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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to refute current emphases on supposedly increased numbers of "students at risk." It is claimed that such terminology usually includes students who drop out, who become teenage mothers, or who are illiterate. Data are presented in tabular form demonstrating that all three of these "risk behaviors" are at their lowest in America's history. It is suggested that the use of the "at risk" label generates its own stigma, prejudice, segregation, and self-fulfilling validation. Debunking the myth of the at-risk student is seen as a step toward positive policy initiatives to avoid the labeling and dead-end tracking of the poor, the members of minority populations, and the handicapped. A focus on the risk behaviors of individuals and the need to improve risk communication is encouraged rather than application of a new label. Includes 27 references. (DB)

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THE MYTH OF THE AT-RISK STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

The national concern over "students at risk" who dropout, become teenage mothers, and are illiterate, paradoxically comes at a time that all three of these "risk behaviors" are at their lowest in America's history. The misuse of the "at risk" label for a growing multiminority generates its own stigma, prejudice, segregation, and self-fulfilling validation. Understanding and debunking the myth of the at-risk student suggest several policy initiatives for avoiding the reliving of Special Education's iatrogenic legacy of labeling and dead-end tracking of the poor, minority, and handicapped.

PERPETUATING THE MYTHS

> Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness...Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfil it (George Santayana, 1905-06, Life of Reason, vol.1,ch.xii. Flux and Constancy in Human Nature).

Thirty years ago, I wrote the "Myth of the brain injured child (Schwartz, L., 1963)." That paper was written in one evening in 1961, while a young professor at Trenton State College, New Jersey. I had just

returned from a meeting in Princeton wherein parents were complaining that their children with learning difficulties in the schools were being denied special educational services available to others. Although denying that their children were eligible for Special Education within the existing disability categories, those advocates persisted in reforming the system to include children with or without an identifiable "minimal cerebral dysfunction." My naive view was that these students presented the epitome of individual differences and that regular education should simply provide the individualized instruction all students require. Instead, those students were blamed as having "learning disabilities," while the school, unwilling at time to provide for the individual with diverse needs, was taken off the hook.

The rest is history. The U.S. Congress, in enacting PL 94-142 in 1975, recognizing that Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) could become the bandora's box of education, placed a 2 percent cap on this controversial new disability category. "...the percentage of 6 through 21 year olds identified with learning disabilities under Part B has increased from 1.2 percent in 1976-77 to 3.6 percent in 1989-90 (Office of Special Education Programs, 1991, p. 15).

More people are handicapped by definition and mindless discrimination than by all the other causes combined. This conference on "Children on the Edge" is based in part upon society's determination that there is a risk group of infants, children, and youth in great danger of becoming school dropouts, having babies as teenagers, and being illiterates. Paradoxically, the national debate on these children "At-Risk" comes at a time that all three of these risk behaviors are at their lowest in America's history. Once again, we are repeating our earlier mistake by blaming the victim.

The author's concern is with the very great temptation to misdiagnose the risk group with children from the growing disadvantaged multiminority rather than focus on the risk behaviors of individuals with actual life threatening conditions in the classroom. Quick-fix educational solutions, although well intentioned, for complex socioeconomic and biomedical problems have historically missed the mark. Despite Head Start, Compensatory Education, and Education of All the Handicapped, the poor, minority, and mildly handicapped, continue to be disproportionately tracked and segregated into dead-end programs of Special Education (Schwartz, L., 1990; Harvard Law Review, 1989; Reschly, D.J., 1988; Schwartz, L., 1987). Mismeasuring and mislabeling students from the growing

multiminority as "At-Risk" further burdens the individual who becomes stigmatized and isolated as a result of this unwanted label.

> The influence of the new mythology on education can be seen in the widespread adoption of the notion of 'at-risk,' which serves to mask the concept of race. When students are classified as 'at-risk,' they are considered to be in danger of not completing school and thereby increasing their chances of being nonproductive members of society (The Advisory Board, Harvard Educational Review, 1988, pp. v-vi).

The typical classroom now include infants, children, and youth, with a myriad of individual differences and special needs. The challenge for Special Education is to distinguish between individuals who we presume to be in a risk group from those with life-threatening risk behaviors. Children with AIDS are in the classroom. Cocaine babies and other infants and toddlers with medically challenging conditions are entering public preschool programs for individuals with disabilities. Students and their teachers in elementary and secondary schools meet almost daily the tragic results of child substance abuse, violent adolescent deaths from accidents, suicide, and

homicide. These individuals are "At-Risk." Additional labels are not needed.

However, the nation-wide debate over "Students At Risk" perpetuates myths about the disadvantaged. This misuse of the label generates its own stigma, prejudice, segregation, and self-fulfilling validation.

Understanding and debunking the myth of "At-Risk" kids who dropout, have babies, and are illiterates, is the author's primary purpose. Learning of the positive human adaptations to various disadvantaged beginnings may contribute to our dispelling the myth that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. "Scientists do not debunk only to cleanse and purge. They refute older ideas in the light of a different view about the nature of things (Gould, S.J., 1981, p. 322)."

DEBUNKING THE MYTH

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazoz (1989) urged Americans "to rescue the very youngest at risk child before he or she is in trouble at all--preventing tomorrow's dropout today (p. 10)." The nation's leading educational spokesperson clearly focused the current debate to a specific targeted population.

> The majority of our dropouts are the children of poverty and minority populations (p. 6).

> Across the nation, 27 million of our citizens are functional illiterates and another 40 to 60 million could be called marginally literate (p. 7);
> Of every 100 children born today, 20 will be born out of wedlock, 13 to teenage mothers, 12 to parents who will divorce before the child is 18, 15 into households where income is below the poverty level...
> It is estimated that by the year 2000, as many as one-third of our young children will be disadvantaged and at-risk (p. 8).

The problems and challenges facing public education in this decade and in the year 2000 go far beyond adding another "At Risk" label to the growing multi-minority. Misdiagnosing fractures in our nation's socioeconomic infrastructure can be as catastrophic as a major earthquake in San Francisco. Misinformation about the problem leads to the unfortunate labeling of children and youth as "At Risk." At risk of what? What is the risk of dropping out, being a teenage mother, or illiterate? What are the facts?

Dropouts

The "dropout problem" is not a new concern in America. In 1908, the nationally prominent Commissioner of Education of New York, Dr. Andrew S. Draper, published

one of the first factual reports on the newly discovered problem.

> I have assumed that practically all of the children who do not go the high schools do finish the elementary schools. That is not the fact...I confess that it startles me to find that not more than a two-fifths and undoubtedly not more than a third of the children who enter our elementary schools ever finish them, and that not more than one-half of them go beyond the fifth or sixth grade (Ayres, L.M., 1909, p. 9).

President John F. Kennedy, in his January 4, 1963, State of the Union Message to the Congress of the United States, reported that "Today [it is] estimated 4 out of 10 students in the fifth grade will not finish high school."

Table 1 and Figure 1 present the changes in percentage of high school graduates and dropouts from 1870 to 1990. The data was derived from the National Center for Education Statistics (1991) and updated by SpecialNet (Oct. 16, 1991). The percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16-24 years has dramatically decreased from 17 percent in 1967 to 8 percent in 1990. Students graduating from high school has significantly increased beyond expectations at the

beginning and middle of this century. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the 1990 dropout rates by sex, race/ethnicity, age, region, and metropolitan status. Most notably are the improvements for minority youth.

Insert Tables 1-2 and Figure 1

It should be noted that during the 1988-89 school year, 43.9 percent of students with disabilities "graduated" with a regular diploma and another 9.7 percent received a "certificate of completion" (Office of Special Education Programs, 1991, p. 29).
Students categorized as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed had the highest dropout rate of 39.1%, Specific Learning Disabilities followed with 26.7%, and the Mentally Retarded with 24%. The National Council on Disability (1989) reported to the President of the United States that "Where the dropout rate is 25% for all students, it is 36% for students with disabilities...By any standard, these statistics are not acceptable (pp. 2-3)."

What is the problem? Are more students graduating from high school while students with mild handicapping conditions are dropping out and exiting school at an unacceptable rate?

Teenage Births

In 1986, "The teenage birth rate of 50.6 live births per 1,000 teenagers 15-19 years was the lowest it had been in the United States since the mid-1930's (National Center for Health Statistics, 1988, p. 1)." Compared to 1960, when about 600,000 adolescent women had babies, 470,000 teenage mothers were having babies in 1986. What appears to be of concern today is that teenage mothers are not married (Raymond, C., 1990, p. A11).

Defining teenage births as a problem defies our knowledge of history. Defining a social problem is a different matter entirely. Davis, R.A. (1989) offers two ways of defining the so-called social problem of teenage pregnancy; either "as a 'problem' in society or of society (p. 19)."

While childbearing by all married women have generally declined during the past 20 years, the number and percentage of babies born to unmarried women has increased. Table 3 and Figure 2 present teenage birth rates for ages 10-14, 15-17, and 18-19, for the years 1966 to 1988. The data was derived from the National Center for Health Statistics (1990). With the exception of the 10 to 14 year old, the birth rate for teenagers 15 to 19 year old also declined, particularly for black adolescents.

Insert Table 3 and Figure 2 Here

The dramatic increase in the birth rate of white unmarried teenagers between 15 and 19 years of age is shown in Table 4 and Figure 3. The rate of births to unmarried white women age 15 to 17 years has almost tripled and between 18 and 19 years it has more than doubled from 1969 to 1988. The rate of births to unmarried black women age 15 to 19 has only slightly increased during this same time period.

Insert Table 4 and Figure 3 Here

The social and moral values imposed on teenage mothers have only recently been associated with the causes of poverty, dropping out of high school, low birth weight and infant mortality, substance abuse, and violent crime. Jencks, C. (1989), has even proposed the term "moral underclass" to describe "both a criminal and a reproductive underclass." Ethnographic research and recent longitudinal comparison group studies appear to suggest that teenage childbearing may be a strategic adaptive indicator to the socioeconomic realities of poverty (Ladner, J., 1971; Geronimus, A.T., 1987; and Geronimus, A.T. and Korenman, S.,

(1991).

What is the problem? Are there now more unmarried teenagers having abortions?

Illiteracy and Functional Literacy

The National Center for Education Statistics (1989) reported a survey by the National Assessment of Education Progress of the basic literacy skills of young adults aged 21 to 25. The study "found that the vast majority (more than 95 percent) had basic literacy skills. On the other hand, only about one-fifth had high proficiency in several types of literacy skills (p. 358)."

Defining basic literacy skills in 1989 is very different from the "27 million...functional illiterates and another 40 to 60 million...marginally literate" identified by Secretary of Education, Cavazoz (Op. Cit. p. 5). Only 5 years earlier, former Secretary of Education Bell "testified that an estimated 72 million Americans, more than half the adult population, do not fully meet the educational requirements of everyday life (Congressional Research Service, 1984, p. MLC-022)." If both Secretaries were talking about the same behaviors, then one could simply conclude that there appears to be a major decrease in illiteracy.

When illiteracy was defined as "the inability to read and write a simple message either in English or in

any other language," illiteracy in the United States between 1870 and 1960 dropped from 20.0 percent to 2.4 percent (Table 5, p. , National Center for Education Statistics, 1964). The U.S. Army during World War II and The U.S. Bureau of the Census both used a fifth-grade equivalency as their standard "to define functional literacy" and "to distinguish functional literates (Harman, D., 1970, p. 227)." If functional literacy continued to be defined by fifth-grade equivalency, then the illiteracy rate for adults 25 to 29 years of age continued its drop down to 1.0 percent in 1989 (Table 6, p. , National Center for Education Statistics, 1991).

However, functional literacy, as the term is used today, does not depend on either reading ability or fifth-grade equivalency. Rather, functional literacy has become part of socioeconomic and political language to describe the effectiveness and relevance of schooling in America. An illiterate is not a person. Depersonalizing the illiterate is similar to our assigning moral and social judgments upon the dropout and on the teenager who is pregnant and unmarried. "Literacy is a <u>social</u> practice, the history and character of which necessarily reflect the prevailing political and structural realities (Levine, K., 1984, p. 263)."

Table 7 presents today's literacy skills as defined by tests purporting to measure Prose Comprehension, Document Literacy, and Quantitative Literacy. Each of these domains are functionally defined and numerically scored. More than 95 percent of adults 21 to 25 years of age demonstrated basic functional literacy skills.

What is the problem? Our schools or society?

IMPROVING RISK COMMUNICATION

How the problems are framed is far more important than adding another "at risk" label to those already burdening the disadvantaged multiminority in our schools. Cuban, L. (1989) repeats the time honored warning of George Bernanos: "There is no worse lie than a problem poorly stated (p. 780)."

The National Research Council (1989) recognized the importance of understanding what the problems are in improving risk communication.

> The risk communication process--usually with many messages from many sources--can be considered successful only to the extent that it first, improves or increases the base of accurate information that decision makers use, be they government officials, industry managers, or individual citizens, and, second, satisfies those involved that they are adequately informed

> within the limits of available knowledge. This does not always lead to consensus about controversial issues or to uniform personal behavior. People do not all share common interests and values, and so better understanding will not necessarily lead them all to the same conclusion (p. 8).

Effective intervention and prevention programs in the Information Age require a special partnership, planning, and collaboration among, teachers, parents, other professionals, and policy makers. Understanding the changing multiminority entering and exiting the public schools is a first step. Learning from the past to prevent reliving it is the ongoing process.

TABLE 1

Changes in Percentage of High School Graduates and Dropouts 1870 to 1990

Year	Graduates	Dropouts
1870	2.0%	
1900	6.4%	
1930	29.0%	
1947	52.6%	
1950	59.0%	
1963	70.9%	
1967	76.3%	17.0%
1970	76.9%	15.0%
1977	73.9%	14.1%
1980	71.4%	14.1%
1986	73.0%	12.1%
1988	74.1%	12.9%
1989	74.1%	12.6%
1990		8.1%

Sources:

1. Graduates - National Center for Education Statistics. (1991). Digest of education statistics 1990, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Table 94. High school graduates compared with population 17 years of age: 1869-70 to 1989-90).

2. Dropouts - Ibid. (Table 97. Percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16-24 years old, by sex and race/ethnicity: October 1967 to October 1989).

3. For the Year 1990 - Dateline. (1991). "1990 dropout rates." Transmitted via SpecialNet, Dateline.America2000, Wed. Oct. 16, 1991 (citing the National Center for Education Statistics).

TABLE 2

1990 Dropout Rates

(Reproduced from Source Cited Below)

	Percent of students who dropped out	School retention rate	Number of dropouts (in thousands)	Percent of all dropouts
Sex				
Male	4.1%	95.9%	177	51.0%
Female	4.0%	96.0	170	49.0
Race/ethnicity1				
White, non-Hispanic	3.4	96.6	208	59.9
Black, non-Hispanic	5.1	94.9	64	18.4
Hispanic	8.1	91.9	64	18.4
Age				
15	3.0	97.0	7	2.0
16-17	2.6	97.4	129	37.2
18-19	5.4	94.6	165	47.6
20-24	16.7	83.3	46	13.3
Region				
Northeast	3.3	96.8	58	16.7
Midwest	3.3	96.7	74	21.3
South	4.6	95.4	131	37.8
West	4.7	95.3	84	24.2
Metropolitan status				
Central city	5.7	94.3	138	39.8
Suburban	3.2	96.8	134	38.6
Nonmetropolitan	3.5	96.5	75	21.6

Source: SpecialNet. (1991). Dateline, Wed. Oct. 16, 1991 (Citing the National Center for Education Statistics).

FIGURE 1

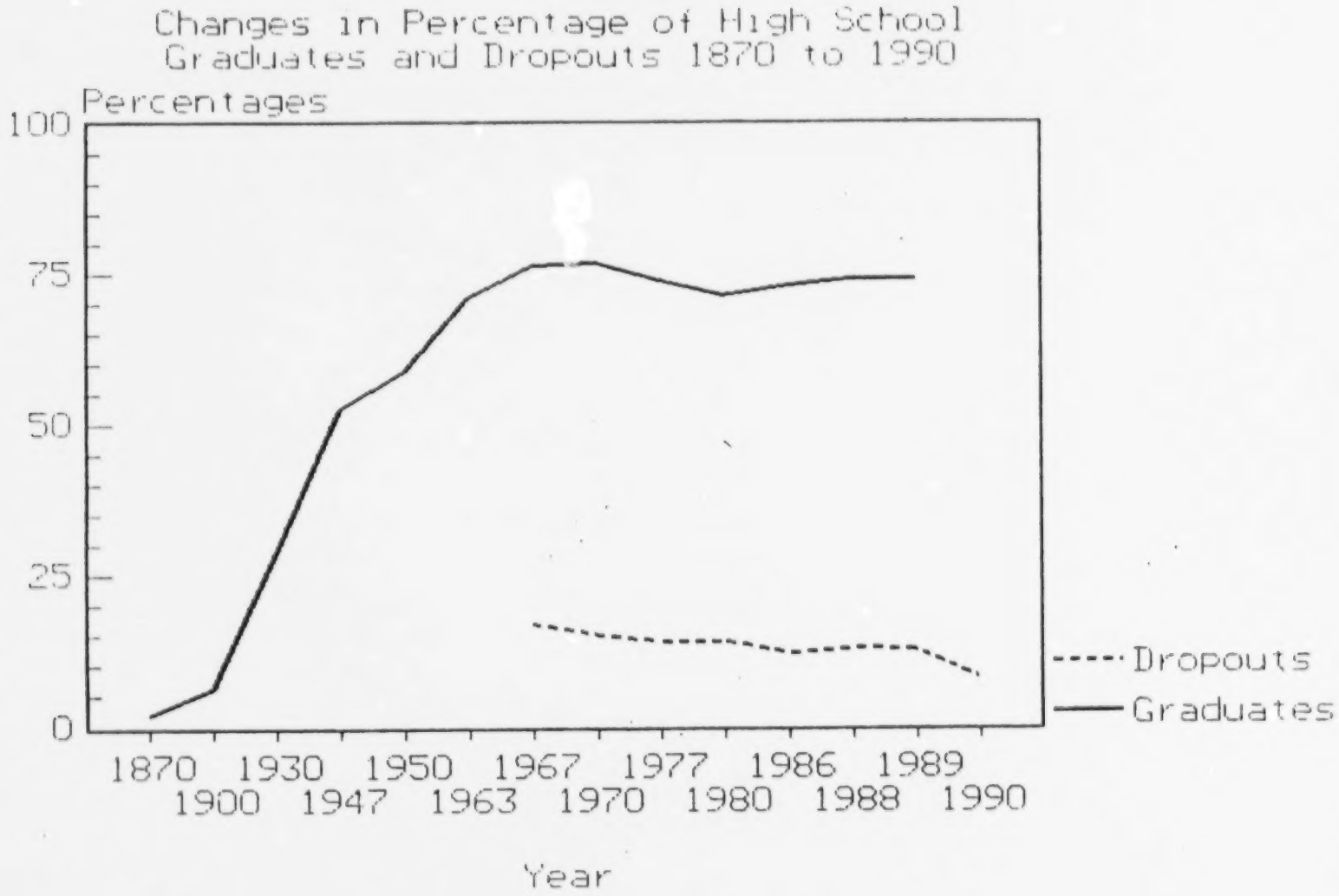
Changes in Percentage of High School Graduates and Dropouts 1870 to 1990
Percentages
100
75
50
25
0
1870
1900
1930
1947
1950
1963
1967
1970
1977
1980
1986
1988
1989
1990
Year
Dropouts
Graduates

TABLE 3

Teenage Birth Rate for Ages 10-14, 15-17, 18-19: 1966 to 1988

(Birth Rates are live births per 1,000 women in specified group)

Year	Age 10 - 14 Yrs. White	Age 10 - 14 Yrs. Black	Age 15 - 19 Yrs. 15 - 17 Yrs. White	Age 15 - 19 Yrs. 15 - 17 Yrs. Black	Age 15 - 19 Yrs. 18 - 19 Yrs. White	Age 15 - 19 Yrs. 18 - 19 Yrs. Black
1966	.3	4.2	26.6	97.9	108.2	219.2
1970	.5	5.2	29.2	101.4	101.5	204.2
1975	.6	5.1	28.0	85.6	74.0	152.4
1980	.6	4.3	25.2	73.6	72.1	138.8
1985	.6	4.5	24.0	69.8	70.1	137.1
1986	.6	4.6	23.4	70.0	69.8	141.0
1987	.6	4.7	24.1	72.9	68.6	142.2
1988	.6	4.8	25.5	76.6	69.2	150.5

Source: National Center for Health Statistics. (1990). Vital statistics of the United State 1988 Volume 1 - Natality. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, Public Health Service, U.S. Government Printing Office (Table 1-6, pp. 7-8).

FIGURE 2

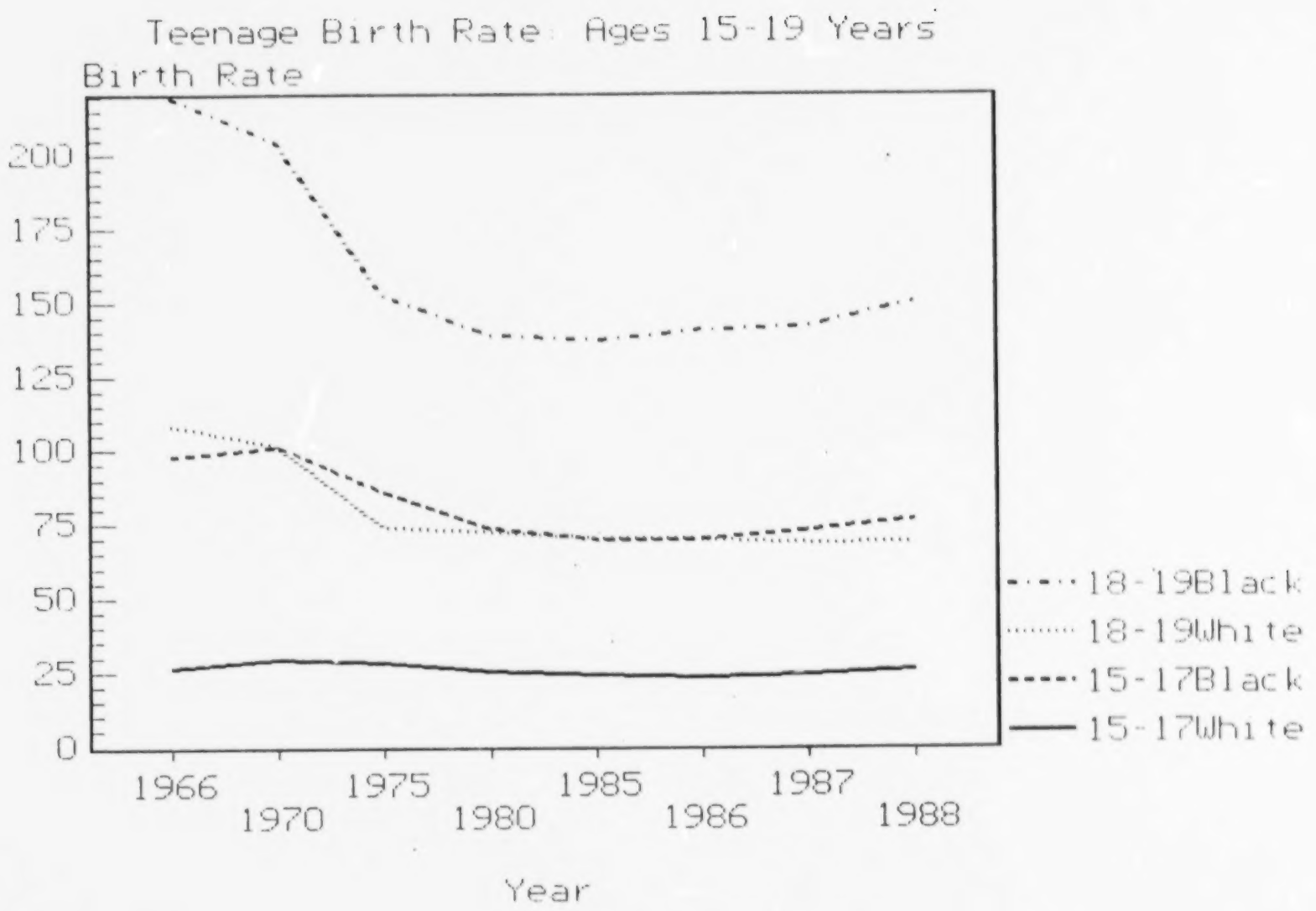
Teenage Birth Rate: Ages 15-19 Years
Birth Rate
200
175
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
1966
1970
1975
1980
1985
1986
1987
1988
Year
18-19Black
18-19White
15-17Black
15-17White

TABLE 4

Birth Rates for Unmarried Women Ages 15-19: 1969-1988

(Birth Rates are number of live births per 1,000)

	Age 15 - 19 Years			
	15 - 17 Yrs.		18 - 19 Yrs.	
Year	White	Black	White	Black
1969	6.6	72.0	16.6	128.4
1970	7.5	77.9	17.6	136.4
1975	9.6	76.8	16.5	123.8
1980	11.8	69.6	23.6	120.2
1985	14.2	67.0	30.9	121.1
1986	14.6	67.4	33.2	125.0
1987	15.8	70.4	34.2	127.5
1988	17.1	74.1	36.4	136.1

Source: National Center for Health Statistics. (1990). Vital statistics of the United States 1988 Volume 1 - Natality. Washington,.D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, U.S. Government Printing Office (Table 1-32, pp. 58-59).

FIGURE 3

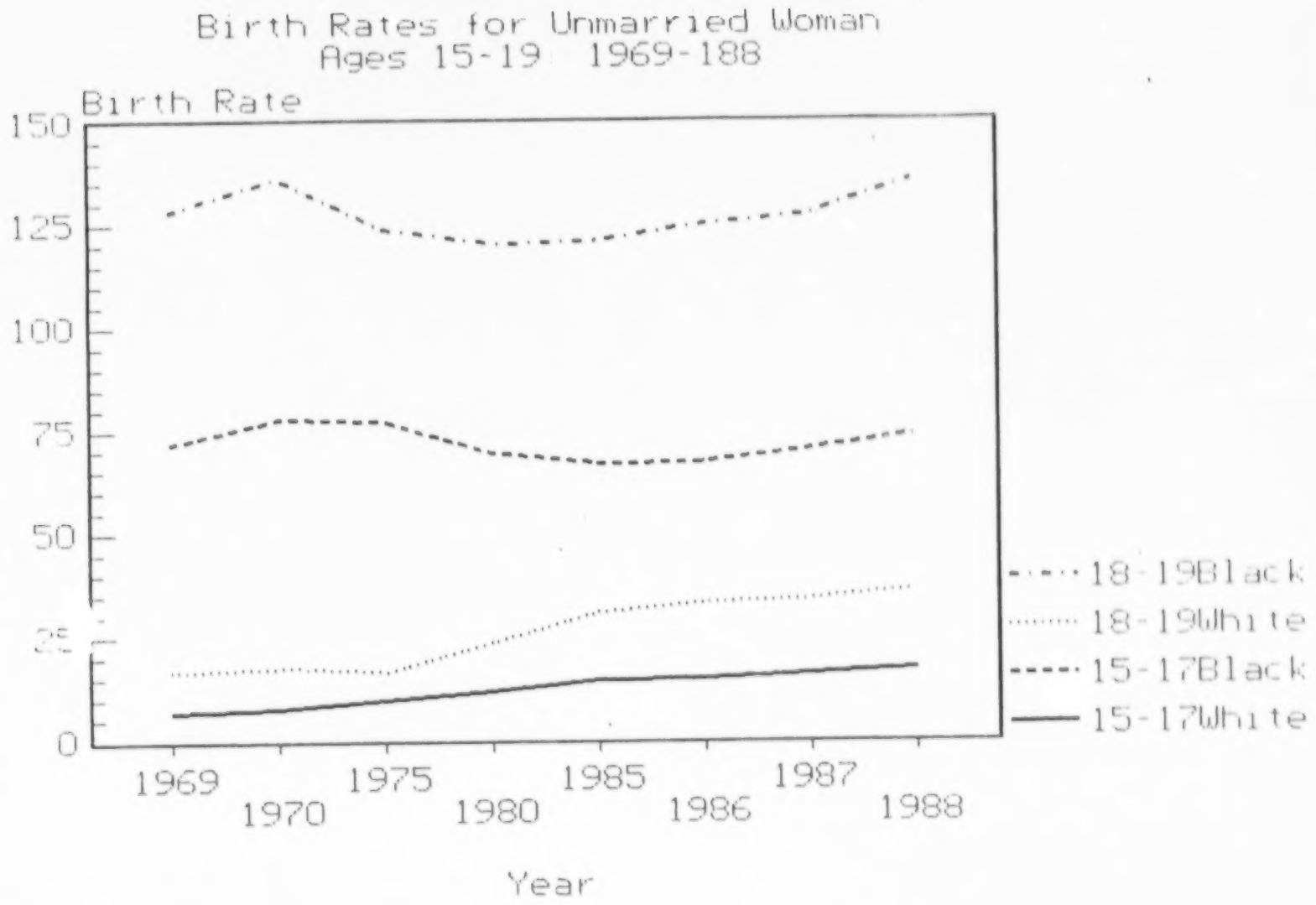
Birth Rates for Unmarried Woman
Ages 15-19 1969-188
Birth Rate
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
1969
1970
1975
1980
1985
1986
1987
1988
Year
18-19Black
18-19White
15-17Black
15-17White

TABLE 5

Illiteracy in the population: United State, 1870 to 1960

Year	Percent Illiterate
1870	20.0
1880	17.0
1890	13.3
1900	10.7
1910	7.7
1920	6.0
1930	4.3
1940	2.9
1950	3.2
1960	2.4

"Illiteracy is defined as 'the inability to read and write a simple message either in English or in any other language.'"

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (1964). Digest of educational statistics 1964 edition. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, U.S. Government Printing Office, OE-10024-64, Bulletin 1964, No. 18 (Table 106, p. 120).

TABLE 6

Years of School Completed by Adults: 1910 to 1989

(Reproduced from Source Cited Below)

Table 8.—Years of school completed by persons age 25 and over and 25 to 29, by race: 1910 to 1989

Race, age, and date	Percent, by years of school completed			Median school years completed
	Less than 5 years of elementary school	4 years of high school or more	4 or more years of college	
1	2	3	4	5
All races				
25 and over				
1910 [1]	23.8	13.5	2.7	8.1
1920 [1]	22.0	16.4	3.3	8.2
1930 [1]	17.5	19.1	3.9	8.4
April 1940	13.7	24.5	4.6	8.6
April 1950	11.1	34.3	6.2	9.3
April 1960	8.3	41.1	7.7	10.5
March 1970	5.3	55.2	11.0	12.2
March 1975	4.2	62.5	13.9	12.3
March 1980	3.4	66.6	17.0	12.5
March 1982	3.0	71.0	17.7	12.6
March 1985	2.7	73.9	19.4	12.6
March 1986	2.7	74.7	19.4	12.6
March 1987	2.4	75.6	19.9	12.7
March 1988	2.4	76.2	20.3	12.7
March 1989	2.5	76.6	21.1	12.7
25 to 29				
April 1940	5.9	38.1	5.9	10.3
April 1950	4.6	52.8	7.7	12.1
April 1960	2.8	60.7	11.0	12.3
March 1970	1.1	75.4	16.4	12.6
March 1975	1.0	83.1	21.9	12.8
March 1980	0.8	85.4	22.5	12.9
March 1982	0.8	86.2	21.7	12.8
March 1985	0.7	86.1	22.2	12.9
March 1986	0.9	86.1	22.4	12.9
March 1987	0.9	86.0	22.0	12.8
March 1988	1.0	85.9	22.7	12.8
White [2]				
25 and over				
April 1940	10.9	26.1	4.9	8.7
April 1950	8.9	36.4	6.6	9.7
April 1960	6.7	43.2	8.1	10.8
March 1970	4.2	57.4	11.6	12.2
March 1975	3.3	64.5	14.5	12.4
March 1980	2.6	70.5	17.8	12.5
March 1982	2.4	72.8	18.5	12.6
March 1985	2.2	75.5	20.0	12.7
March 1986	2.2	76.2	20.1	12.7
March 1987	2.0	77.0	20.5	12.7
March 1988	2.0	77.7	20.9	12.7
March 1989	2.0	78.3	21.7	12.7
White [2] (continued)				
25 to 29				
1920 [1]	12.9	22.0	4.5	8.5
April 1940	3.4	41.2	6.4	10.7
April 1950	3.3	56.3	8.2	12.2
April 1960	2.2	63.7	11.8	12.3
March 1970	0.9	77.8	17.3	12.6
March 1975	1.0	84.4	22.8	12.8
March 1980	0.8	86.9	23.7	12.9
March 1982	0.8	86.9	22.7	12.9
March 1985	0.8	86.8	23.2	12.9
March 1986	0.9	86.5	23.5	12.9
March 1987	0.8	86.3	23.0	12.9
March 1988	1.0	86.6	23.5	12.9
Black and other races [2]				
25 and over				
April 1940	41.8	7.7	1.3	6.7
April 1950	32.6	13.7	2.2	8.9
April 1960	23.5	21.7	3.5	8.2
March 1970	14.7	36.1	6.1	10.1
March 1975	11.7	46.4	9.2	11.4
March 1980	8.8	54.6	11.1	12.2
March 1982	7.4	58.1	12.4	12.3
March 1985	6.0	63.2	15.4	12.4
March 1986	5.5	65.3	15.2	12.4
March 1987	5.1	66.7	15.7	12.4
March 1988	5.1	66.7	16.4	12.5
March 1989	5.6	67.0	16.8	12.5
25 to 29				
1920 [1]	44.6	6.3	1.2	5.4
April 1940	27.0	12.3	1.6	7.1
April 1950	18.1	23.6	2.8	8.7
April 1960	7.2	38.8	5.4	10.8
March 1970	2.2	58.4	10.0	12.2
March 1975	0.7	73.8	15.4	12.6
March 1980	1.0	77.0	15.2	12.7
March 1982	0.7	82.2	15.8	12.8
March 1985	0.5	82.4	16.7	12.8
March 1986	0.9	84.3	16.3	12.8
March 1987	1.1	84.1	16.9	12.8
March 1988	1.2	82.0	18.1	12.8

[1] Estimates based on retrojection, by the Bureau of the Census, of 1940 census data on education by age.

[2] Persons of Hispanic origin are included, as appropriate, in the "white" or in the "black and other races" category.

NOTE.—Data for 1975 and subsequent years are for the noninstitutional population. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population, 1960, Vol. 1 part 1; *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20; Series P-19, No. 4; 1980 Census Monograph, "Education of the American Population," by John K. Folger and Charles B. Nam; and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, "Educational Attainment of Workers, March 1988," unpublished. (This table was prepared May 1990.)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (1991). Digest of education statistics 1990. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Table 8).

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TABLE 7

Literacy Skills of Young Adults 21 to 25 Years of Age: 1985

(Reproduced from Source Cited Below)

Table 355.—Literacy skills and reading scores of young adults,[1] by race/ethnicity and level of education: 1985

Young adult characteristic	Prose literacy scale,[2] percent with score of—				Document literacy,[3] percent with score of—				Quantitative literacy,[4] percent with score of—			
	200 or more	250 or more	300 or more	350 or more	200 or more	250 or more	300 or more	350 or more	200 or more	250 or more	300 or more	350 or more
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Total	**96.1**	**82.7**	**56.4**	**21.1**	**95.5**	**83.8**	**57.2**	**20.2**	**96.4**	**84.7**	**58.0**	**22.5**
Race/ethnicity												
White, non-Hispanic	98.1	89.7	63.0	24.3	98.2	89.5	64.1	24.9	98.1	89.4	62.9	24.8
Black, non-Hispanic	86.3	57.2	21.3	3.5	84.4	56.5	20.1	2.2	87.8	58.0	21.4	3.3
Hispanic	93.5	73.6	40.9	13.5	92.0	69.8	35.9	9.4	92.8	72.5	35.2	9.2
Educational attainment												
Not high school graduate	85.4	57.9	24.1	3.4	83.4	53.6	18.8	1.5	86.1	57.7	20.6	3.5
High school graduate	99.6	81.6	45.1	10.5	96.5	81.8	46.2	9.0	96.9	80.5	45.2	10.1
Some postsecondary	98.8	92.0	67.0	26.8	99.0	92.1	68.0	27.2	99.3	92.7	68.8	27.0
College graduate	99.9	97.7	84.3	44.8	99.9	98.0	85.6	48.8	99.9	97.8	84.1	45.3

[1] Includes persons 21 to 25 years old. Excludes persons not living in households and those who were unable to speak English.

[2] Prose comprehension test measures the knowledge and skills needed to gain understanding and use information from texts such as editorials, news stories, and poems. A score of 200 indicates an ability to write a simple description of the type of job one would like to have. A score of 300 indicates an ability to locate information in a news article or an almanac. A score of 350 indicates an ability to synthesize the main argument from a lengthy newspaper editorial.

[3] Document literacy test measures the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information from documents such as indexes, tables, paycheck stubs, and order forms. A score of 200 indicates ability to match money-saving coupons to a shopping list of several items. A score of 300 indicates an ability to follow directions to travel from one location to another using a map. A score of 350 indicates an ability to use a bus schedule to select the appropriate bus for given departures and arrivals.

[4] Quantitative literacy test measures the knowledge and skills needed to apply the arithmetic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, either alone or sequentially. A score of 200 indicates an ability to total two entries on a bank deposit slip. A score of 300 indicates an ability to enter deposits and checks and balance a checkbook. A score of 350 indicates an ability to determine the amount of a tip in a restaurant using a given percentage.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Young Adult Literacy and Schooling.* (This table was prepared May 1989.)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (1991). Digest of educational statistics 1990. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

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